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SUBJECT: ANALYSIS OF 2009 PARLIAMENTARY LEADERSHIP ELECTIONS

REF: KABUL 25

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Both houses of Afghanistan's Parliament elected their leaderships to new one-year terms this week. This year's elections showed evidence of President Karzai's low standing among MPs and the continued tendency for MPs to vote along ethnic, rather than ideological or gender lines. There were no major changes from 2008, but the voting margins produced one of the few tangible insights into parliamentary blocs. Parliament's usual system of voting by an unrecorded show of hands and electing MPs from non-partisan ballots otherwise obscures the machinations of most backdoor dealings (reftel). But even though voting for leadership positions is done by secret ballot, we can use the results to estimate certain factions' strength. End summary.

¶2. (U) Both Lower House Speaker Yunus Qanooni (Kabul, Tajik) and Upper House Speaker Sebghatullah Mojaddedi (Kabul, Tajik) won five-year terms upon Parliament's first seating in ¶2005. Each year, both houses hold elections for one-year terms for the other leadership positions: First Deputy Speaker, Second Deputy Speaker, First Secretary, and Second Secretary. The Deputy Speakers chair sessions in the Speaker's absence and manage other assigned duties (such as coordinating MPs' foreign travel requests and international donor assistance). The secretary positions have little official power, but offer a chance for MPs to balance the ethnic or ideological makeup of the leadership. All winners require a majority of votes from MPs present; a failure to win a majority triggers second-round balloting, usually held the following day. For the 2009 Lower House elections, 213 MPs (of 249 seats) were present on the first day of balloting.

First Deputy Race Shows Karzai's Inability to Rally Votes

¶3. (SBU) Incumbent Lower House First Deputy Speaker Mirwais Yaseni (Nangarhar, Pashtun) won re-election by a sizable 135-58 margin over Aref Noorzai (Kandahar, Pashtun), who held the position in the 2006 and 2007 sessions. Minor candidates attracted a smattering of votes and some MPs intentionally invalidated their ballots, hoping to hold out for more payoffs in a second-round vote. According to several MPs and Parliament watchers, Noorzai spent a small fortune trying to win back his position with implicit support from Karzai (Noorzai's sister is married to Karzai's brother and Kandahar strongman Ahmad Wali Karzai). Yaseni told PolOff he didn't expect to fare as well as he did given Noorzai's financial investment in his campaign. However, Yaseni estimated he won an overwhelming majority of Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek votes, as well as about 40 percent of Pashtun votes. Haji Ibrahim, Qanooni's brother and chief of staff, admitted United Front MPs rallied to Yaseni to block a Karzai ally from power. Parliament staff said the vote confirmed their suspicions that Karzai's reliable supporters in the Lower House could not exceed 60 votes.

14. (SBU) Elections for both Second Deputy Speaker and First Secretary required second rounds, as incumbents Amanullah Payman (Badakhshan, Tajik) and Abdul Satar Khawasi (Parwan, Pashtun) initially fell short of the required majority. Payman won 85 votes in the first round, which we believe is a good indicator of the United Front's baseline support. Female candidates Raqia Niall (Ghor, Hazara) and Safia Sediqi (Nangarhar, Pashtun) captured 42 and 36 votes, respectively. Third Line candidate Mir Ahmad Joyenda (Kabul, Hazara) was fourth with 28 votes, revealing the maximum support for the Lower House's most secular faction. In the First Secretary race, Khawasi polled 98 votes to Abdul Satar Darzabi's (Jowzjan, Uzbek) 95.

15. (SBU) Incumbents Khawasi and Payman initially appeared to be in trouble amid talk of a Hazara-Uzbek alliance to support each other's candidates. Moreover, two female runners-up in the Second Deputy Speaker race seemed to guarantee a woman would win a leadership position for the first time since 2006. However, the mostly Tajik United Front MPs and a large bloc of Pashtuns struck a deal overnight to protect their incumbents. With poorer attendance the following day and women tending to vote their ethnicity over their gender, Payman and Khawasi each polled comfortable majorities in the second round. Niall, with no financial or political organizational efforts behind her, only added 19 votes to her first-day total. Despite accounting for more than 25 percent of Parliament (and an even higher day-to-day percentage given their male

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colleagues' absenteeism), women do not hold any of the 10 leadership positions in the two houses.

16. (U) Second Secretary Dr. Saleh Saljoqi (Herat, Tajik) won a first-round victory over minor competition. He is the only MP in a leadership position in either house from a Western province -- MPs' desire for regional and ethnic balances being one reason behind his easy win.

Upper House Leadership Consolidates Support

17. (SBU) Upper House election results were less vigorously contested. Incumbents Deputy Speaker Hamed Gailani (Paktia, Pashtun), First Secretary Mawlawi Muzafari (Kapisa, Tajik), and Second Secretary Abdul Khaliq Hussaini (Laghman, Pashtun) won easy re-election on the strength of Gailani's Harmony Group faction, which he said now controls a majority of the 102 Upper House seats. In the sole change in this year's election, MPs swapped out one Harmony Group 2nd Deputy Speaker for another, as Engineer Aref Sarwari (Panjshir, Tajik) edged Burhanullah Shinwari (Nangarhar, Pashtun).
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